Enhancing Communication to Improve Team Performance at the Leader Level

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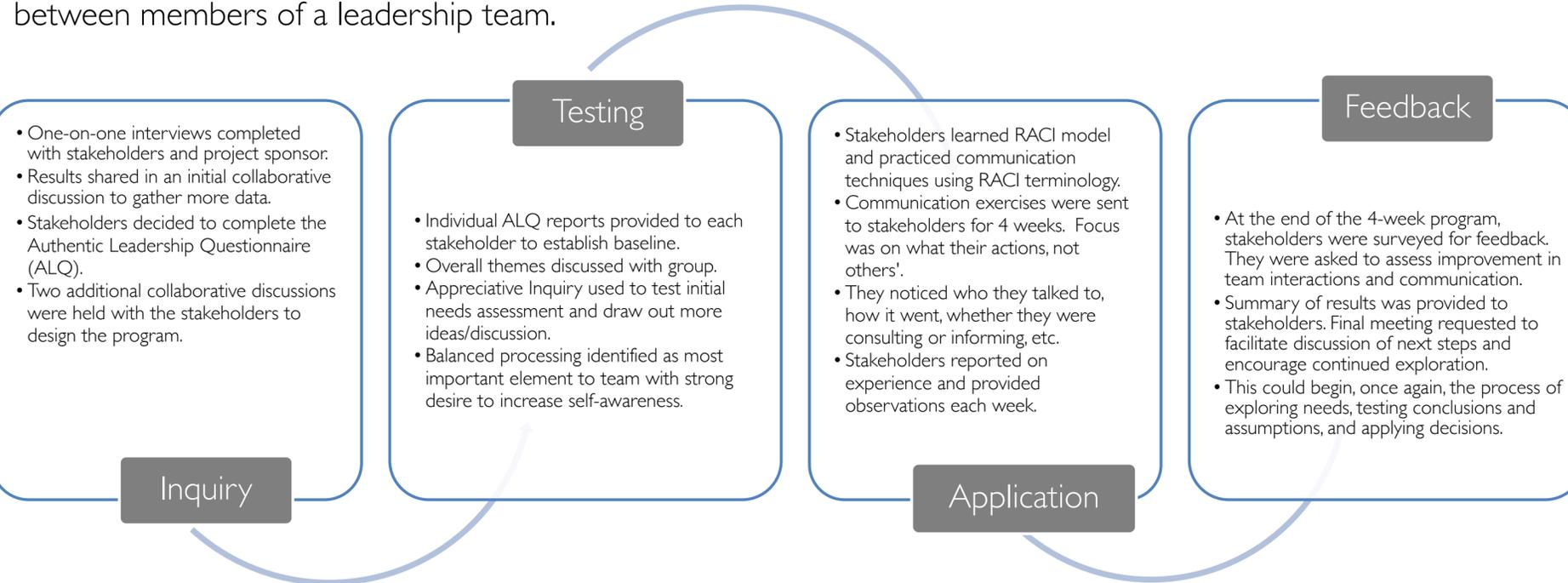### phyllis.sarkaria@claremontlincoln.edu

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What I Did

This project explored how awareness and practice of authentic leadership behaviors can improve communication between members of a leadership team.

Inquiry
- One-on-one interviews completed with stakeholders and project sponsor.
- Results shared in an initial collaborative discussion to gather more data.
- Stakeholders decided to complete the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ).
- Two additional collaborative discussions were held with the stakeholders to design the program.

Testing
- Individual ALQ reports provided to each stakeholder to establish baseline.
- Overall themes discussed with group.
- Appreciative Inquiry used to test initial needs assessment and draw out more ideas/discussion.
- Balanced processing identified as most important element to team with strong desire to increase self-awareness.

Application
- Stakeholders learned RACI model and practiced communication techniques using RACI terminology.
- Communication exercises were sent to stakeholders for 4 weeks. Focus was on what their actions, not others'.
- They noticed who they talked to, how it went, whether they were consulting or informing, etc.
- Stakeholders reported on experience and provided observations each week.

Feedback
- At the end of the 4-week program, stakeholders were surveyed for feedback. They were asked to assess improvement in team interactions and communication.
- Summary of results was provided to stakeholders. Final meeting requested to facilitate discussion of next steps and encourage continued exploration.
- This could begin, once again, the process of exploring needs, testing conclusions and assumptions, and applying decisions.

Why I Did It

- My Capstone project provided an opportunity for the stakeholders to consciously collaborate on a solution to the communication and decision making challenges they face.

- The project sponsor worried that his leaders tended to withhold information until an emergency occurred in order to activate their strengths. He commented that each of these leaders typically made up their mind on issues without seeking input from colleagues, coming to meetings eager to convince the others of the "right" answer.

- By the stakeholders' own admission, they did not listen well to one another or at least tended not to listen to understand alternative points of view. Consequently, they failed to appreciate the risk of non-collaboration and the potential added value generated from diversity of perspective.

- The team's ability to work well together was particularly important given the continuing challenges of the global economy which require these leaders to demonstrate agility and innovation while keeping operating costs low in order to deliver on high expectations.

Claremont Core™ — Mindfulness, Dialogue, Change, Collaboration

Key References

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Who I Worked With

- An intact work group of 12 leaders in director and manager positions in the Operations function of a manufacturing organization.
- Fairly homogenous group - primarily white and male, with 75% Caucasian and only one female. More diversity in terms of age and education.
  - Participants ranged in age from the mid-30s to the late-50s.
  - All had more than 10 years of professional industry experience.
  - All stakeholders had some education beyond high school, though only 50% hold Bachelor's or Masters degrees.
  - All twelve currently had direct reports.
- They are relatively experienced managers. A majority (75%) of the stakeholders had been in supervisory positions more than 10 years.

What We Accomplished

CHANGE FOR ME

My Capstone project brought to life the advice that I should "trust the wisdom in the room." At times it was messy and uncomfortable but by guiding the process and allowing the participants to determine the speed and direction, I realized that I am a better change agent when I let go of "my" solution and allow my stakeholders to make their own sustainable change.

CHANGE FOR PARTICIPANTS

At the close of the program, several stakeholders commented on feeling empowered to take on change and see what they could accomplish personally and professionally. They reported that they were more appreciative of the need for clear communication and listening to team members in order to be better leaders.

CHANGE FOR THE PROBLEM

The project sponsor indicated that there was less conflict within his leadership team and that they were working more collegially because of the work we did together. He saw the collaborative process as a good foundation for continued growth as a team.

90.91%	Increased engagement from collaboration.
90.91%	Increased awareness of communication behaviors.
63.63%	Changed view of colleagues.
54.55%	Working better together as a team.
54.55%	Communication skills improved.
54.56%	Trust levels are higher.

Summary of Outcomes from Program (% agreed/strongly agreed)